Volunteer Fire Company Planning Processes

New techniques to better manage your organization's resources

VFIS

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In recent years a number of new techniques and processes have been introduced into the emergency service community. While practiced with diligence in larger departments, the value of strategic planning, risk assessment and standard of response cover have now reached the volunteer service and serve as new challenges to the officers of these organizations.

Most businesses want to improve their operations and enhance the product or service they provide to the customer. The techniques described herein are no different. They are quality of service enhancement techniques. Techniques that, if applied, will help you better organize your department and serve your "customers". These techniques have been proven in both business and emergency services to improve the service delivery system for the future.

Each technique stands alone, and also serves as a component of total quality management for your organization.

"Standards of Response Cover," "Risk Assessment" and "Strategic Planning" are three techniques you can use within an emergency service organization (ESO) to respond to the ever-changing environment of your organization. Read on to learn more about their application to volunteer emergency service organizations.

Strategic Planning for Emergency Service Organizations

"Strategic Planning," "Risk Assessment," and "Standards of Response Cover" are three techniques you can use within an emergency services organization (ESO) to respond to the ever-changing environment of your organization.

"Strategic Planning" or "Strategic Focus" has been described as a set of concepts, procedures and tools designed to assist leaders and managers in exercising control, coping with change, and developing a basis for decision making (J.M. Bryson, Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations).

The Strategic Focus process can help you answer such questions as:

- What are the fire department's objectives for the next five years?
- Where will our organization be in seven years?
- What are the fire department's capital purchasing plans for the next ten years?
- What is the fire department's standard of response cover?

Be Prepared! If you haven't been asked before, it will only be a matter of time. When the questions are asked, you will need to respond. Your strategic plan should be able to provide the answers.

In recent years there have been several approaches to performance enhancement of both profit and nonprofit organizations. The terminology may vary; however, as long as you are driving the organization to future decision and action to assure organizational success, you are strategically focused and planning.

Creating and implementing a strategic focus helps the organization understand its resources, capabilities, and needs. In order to be successful in the development of such a plan, an appropriate planning model is necessary. VFIS has created such a model to assist in this planning process through its education, training and consulting unit, Emergency Services Education and Consulting Group (ESECG).

The "ESECG Strategic Focus Model" is driven by three components:

- organization resource assessment
- defined service expectation
- priority planning to enable resources to meet expectations.

By incorporating these components, it creates a disciplined process that develops basic decisions and actions that help structure what your emergency service organization is, does, and why it does it. In essence the process creates decisions about the ESO's future.

Any ESO strategic focus initiative must start with a risk assessment for all services to be delivered. Today, this means assessing rescue, hazmat, emergency medical and storm

management risks as much as fire; and, all must be prioritized against fire and injury prevention which may be more important to the community.

Once the risk assessment is complete and you begin to envision the delivery and support system's need, you can focus on identifying individualized issues and needs to determine the necessary steps to create a plan which turns vision into reality.

ESECG advocates using a derivative of the standard decision making process, employing five basic activities to evaluate organization resource assessment, defined service expectation, and priority planning; and, create an appropriate plan for future service delivery. The five basic activities include:

Identification and Analysis of Key Issues (identifying, developing, creating…)
- mission and vision
- standard of response cover
- identification of roles and responsibilities
- goals and objectives
- SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats).
- strategic alliances

Obtain Direction from Key Sources of Input
- from organizational members
- from the community leaders
- from the citizenry
- from the business community
- from mutual aid agencies

Development of a Plan for Implementation Over a Defined Time Period
- immediate action steps to achieve goals and objectives
- long-term plan for implementation

Implementation of a Plan with Responsibilities and Time Frames Involving:
- finance
- personnel
- apparatus
- equipment
- facilities
- processes and procedures

Design and utilize a monitoring method to assure plan's success.

By identifying and acting on the issues described above you can increase the efficiency of your ESO and plan for future contingencies. The model is further detailed in Figure 1.

The result of any strategic focus initiative is change. Therefore, any such process must be undertaken by an organization that is ready for the change. If the organization is not ready for the change, then conflict can and will exist. As a result, change management practices must be identified and catalogued for reference as the planning process moves forward.

The strategic planning process serves as a single point of collection to coordinate various data points, administrative processes, and planning consideration. This integration of benchmark performance budgetary commitments mission statements, assessment of ESO activities, etc., serves the management team with a summary report of the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization.

Figure 1—ESECG "Strategic Focus Model"

Identifying and prioritizing the initiatives critical to an organization's performance assures long-term ESO health and growth. The output from this process establishes coordinated goals, objectives, and in some cases, action steps dealing with the organization aspects of:
- finance,
- personnel,
- facilities,
- apparatus,
- equipment,
- procedural/process.

These are then consolidated into planning documents, including identified costs, time frames to complete, and responsibilities, for completion. The process then identifies different sets of objectives for organizational action.

In conclusion, while we may want it to be "the same old fire service as the glory years of the 60s," it isn't. Today, ESOs are complex and dynamic, and must identify what they are doing, why they are doing it, and implement change if current initiatives are ineffective or problematic. The strategic focus process helps you develop the vision of where you want/need to be and how to get there.

Figure 1. The Planning Process

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│ Activity One:                                     │
│ Identification and Analysis of Key Issues         │
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          ↓
    ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
    │ Activity Two:                                     │
    │ Obtain Direction from Key Sources of Input        │
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              │
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        ┌──────────────────────────────────┐       ┌──────────────────┐
        │ Activity Three:                   │──────▶│ Change           │
        │                                   │       │ Management       │
        │ Development of a Plan of Action   │       │ Actions          │
        └──────────────────────────────────┘       │ Required         │
                      │                              └──────────────────┘
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              ┌──────────────────────────────────┐          │
              │ Activity Four:                    │◀─────────┘
              │ Implementation of a Plan with     │
              │ Responsibilities and Time Frames  │
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                  ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
                  │ Activity Five:                        │
                  │ Design and Utilize a monitoring        │
                  │ method to assure plan success.         │
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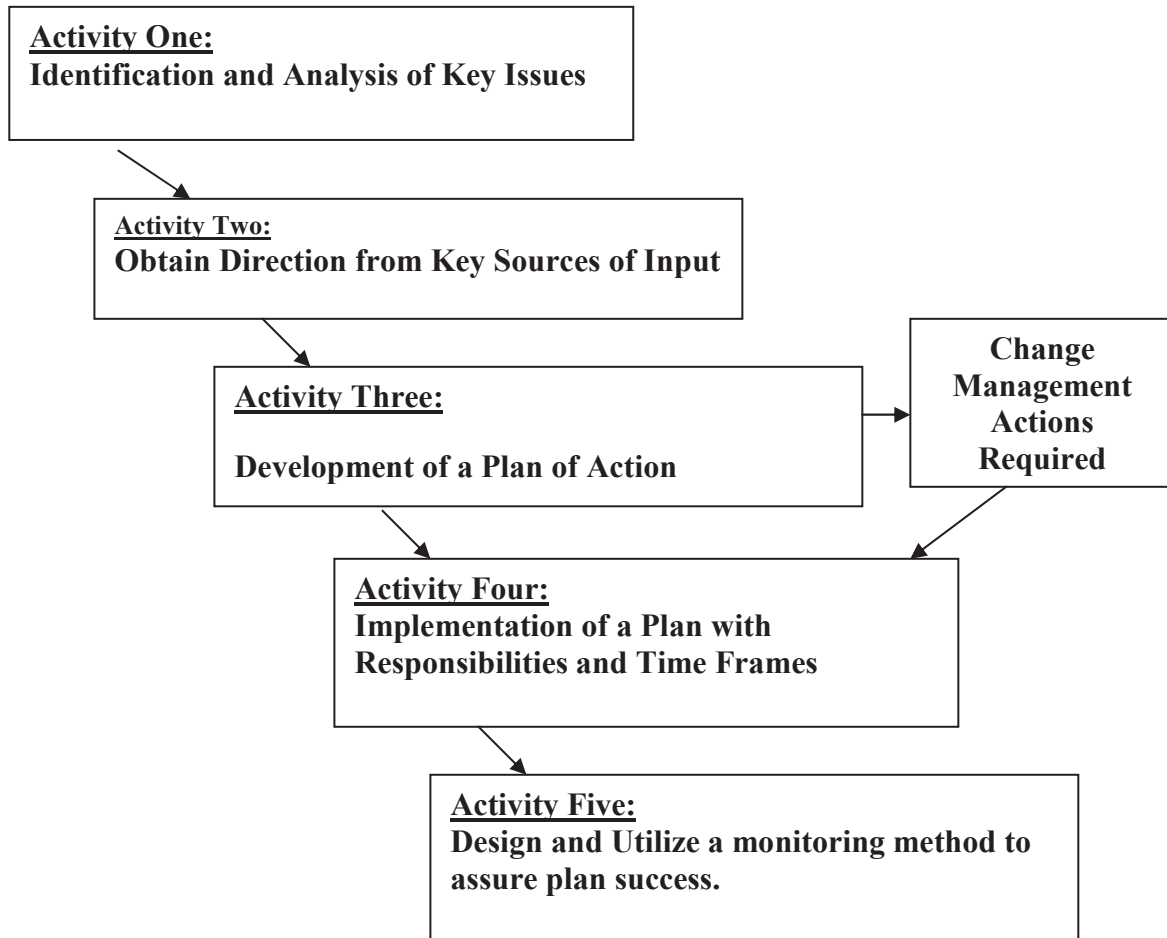
Credits

The VFIS "Strategic Focus Process" is a compilation of several strategic planning organizations and documents customized to meet the needs of volunteer fire service (nonprofit) agencies. Among the references are:

Bryson, John M., Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1988.

Center for Simplified Strategic Planning, The Support Center, "What are the steps of a strategic planning process?"

Jenaway, W.F., "Volunteer Fire Service Strategic Focus," VFIS News, Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 1-2.

Jenaway, W.F., Transforming the Volunteer Fire Service, VFIS, 2003. 76 pp.

Jenaway, W.F., & Gardiner, Daniel B.C., Fire Protection in the 21st Century, ISFSI. 1996. 85 pp.

Myma Associates Inc., "What Strategic Planning Can Do For You".

Organized Change Consultancy, "Strategic Planning and Organizational Change".

The Support Center, "What are the Key Concepts and Definitions in Strategic Planning".

CFAI, "Section 3—Strategic Planning, Risk Assessment and Standards of Response Coverage," CFAI Self Assessment Manual, Chantilly, VA, 2004.

Risk Assessment – Fire Service Planning

"Risk Assessment," "Strategic Planning," and "Standard of Response Cover" are three techniques you can use within an emergency service organization (ESO) to respond to the ever-changing environment of your organization.

According to the Commission on Fire Accreditation, Assessment and Planning are defined as "the process(es) used to identify the community's fire protection and other emergency service needs in order to identify potential goals and objectives. All agencies should have a basic source of data information in order to logically and rationally define the organization's mission. The overall purpose of using these processes is to establish a long-range general strategy for the operation of the system."[1]

Many fire chiefs have been performing a component of comprehensive risk assessment and planning, known as "Pre-Planning," which serves as a decision-making process to understand risks and hazards at a location, analyze resource needs and impacts in the event of an emergency, and being ready to respond when necessary." This is a critical component of Risk Assesment, but only one of several components needed.

Are you prepared (excerpted from *VFIS News*)[2]

The World Future Society regularly publishes a report entitled "Trends Shaping the Future." This report focuses on general economic trends, social and demographic changes and trends in energy and the environment. Each of these trends drives a demand on the world, be it long range or short term.

But we can also utilize forecasts of such trends to better match the needs and resources of the emergency service community. Ask yourself, "Do you monitor trends locally and change your operations accordingly to meet new needs and challenges? Are you shaping the future of your ESO to the needs of your response area? Is the community population in your response zone growing? Is it aging? Are the types and nature of businesses, highways and structures changing? They probably are, and you should be asking yourself if your ESO is currently planning for yesterday or tomorrow.

The World Future Society report identifies trends such as:

- the world's population will double over the next 40 years
- the population of the developed world is living longer
- the growth of the information sectors is creating a knowledge dependent society
- societal values are changing rapidly
- physical-culture and personal health movements will remain strong
- family structures are becoming more diverse

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[1] Commission on Fire Accreditation International, "Category 2—Assessment and Planning," Self Assessment Workbook for Fire Service Accreditation, CFAI, Chantilly, VA, 2004, p. 40.
[2] Jenaway, W.F., "Fire Service Planning = Risk Assessment, the Optimum Management Activity," VFIS News, Vol. 3 No 4, 2003.

- oil consumption is still rising rapidly and will continue to be a mainstay energy source
- water shortages will continue
- continuing urbanization will aggravate most environmental and societal problems

"So what!" you say. "This is big picture stuff and has nothing to do with my town!"

If your approach is to rationalize such changes in attempting to make them seem insignificant, you are either ignoring the duty you have to assess the constantly changing risk patterns in your community, or you don't understand the obligation you have to plan for the demands of your community.

Emergency service organizations must expand their use of fundamental assessment and planning effort to assure they can meet future demands. This is defined as the process used to identify the community's fire protection and other emergency service needs in order to identify potential goals and objectives. All agencies should have a basic source of data and information in order to logically and rationally define the organization's mission. The end result of the process is to establish a long-range general strategy for the operation of the system. You can achieve this goal by:

1. Documenting area characteristics by collecting historical data, and instituting a process by which risks are defined and potential organizational goals and objectives are established.

2. The organization then assesses the nature and magnitude of the hazards within its jurisdiction, with each significant event categorized and listed, to permit future analysis and study in determining standards of coverage and related services.

3. The organization next assesses the nature and magnitude of other hazards and risks within its jurisdiction and identifies appropriate strategies, methods of operation, and resource allocation required to mitigate potential emergencies.

4. Finally, the result is a "strategic" or other form of long term (typically three to five years into the future) planning process that, along with a budget, is guiding the activities of the organization.

5. The plan is then submitted to the appropriate authority having jurisdiction for review and implementation.

The coordination of these actions creates a plan to manage your emergency response district. This plan, based on a factual, technical basis, will help individuals in all walks of life better understand your organization's goals and help you work toward them.

Conclusion

The result of using either the above described process or the "Pre-Emergency Planning Process" described in Figure 1, or any localized process is to assist in the development of a "Standard of Response Coverage," which has taken into consideration the area of responsibility, demographics, economic indicators, fire loss data, water supply, and automatic fire protection information.

Finally, remember this—while only a few trends are noted in this document, the point is to recognize that change is constant. You need to change your capabilities, response system, staffing, resources, etc., on the same basis that our society changes.
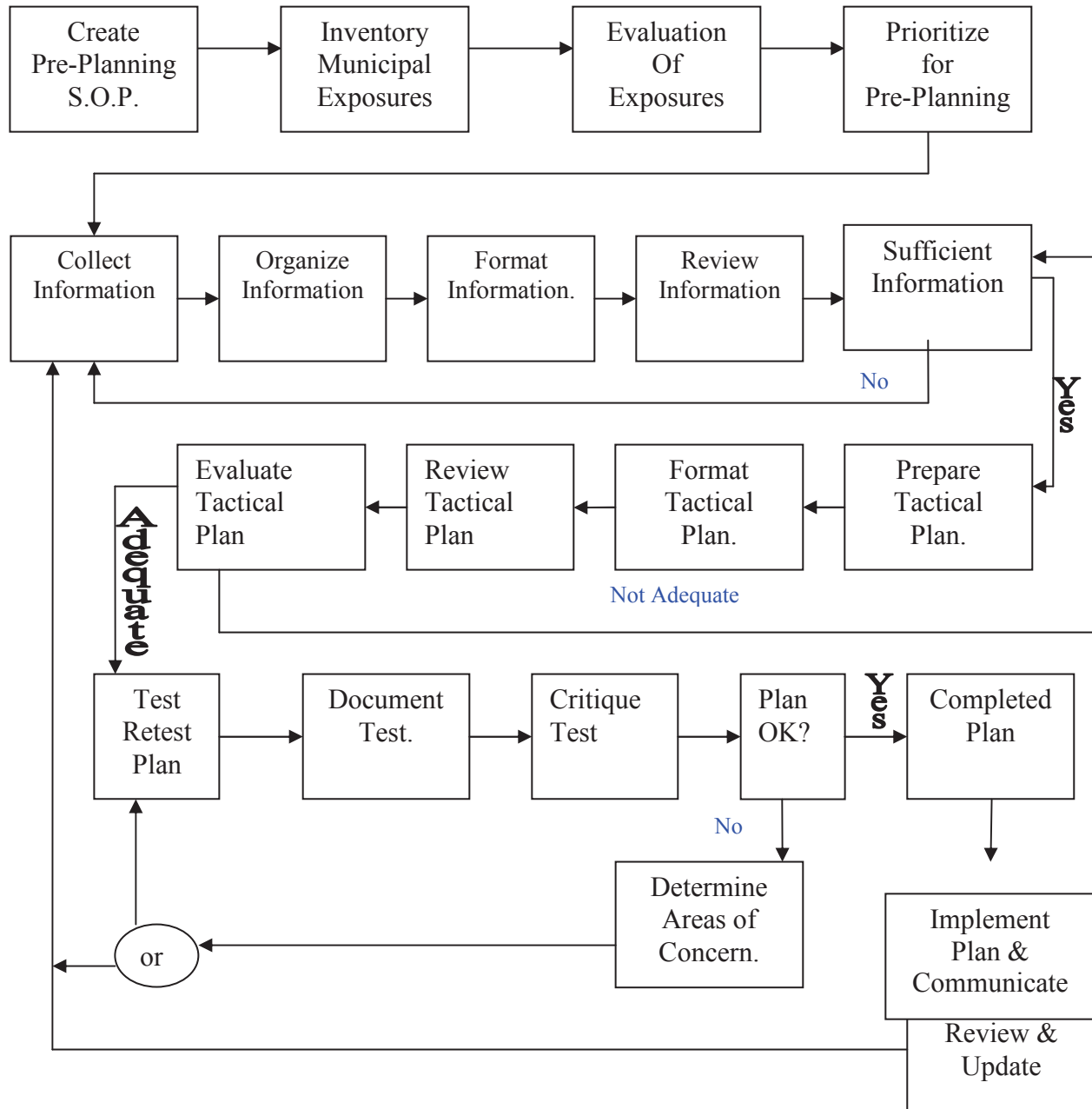
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Commission on Fire Accreditation International, "Category 2—Assessment and Planning," Self Assessment for Fire Service Accreditation, CFAI, Chantilly, VA, 2004, Pages 40-88.

Jenaway, W.F., "Fire Service Planning – Risk Assessment"

Jenaway, W.F., Pre Emergency Planning, ISFSI, 1996

Figure 1—Pre-Emergency Planning Process[3]

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┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐
│   Create    │     │  Inventory  │     │ Evaluation  │     │ Prioritize  │
│ Pre-Planning│ ──► │  Municipal  │ ──► │     Of      │ ──► │     for     │
│   S.O.P.    │     │  Exposures  │     │  Exposures  │     │ Pre-Planning│
└─────────────┘     └─────────────┘     └─────────────┘     └─────────────┘

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│   Collect   │   │  Organize   │   │   Format    │   │   Review    │   │ Sufficient  │
│ Information │──►│ Information │──►│ Information.│──►│ Information │──►│ Information  │
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                                                                  No           │ Yes
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│  Evaluate   │   │   Review    │   │   Format    │   │   Prepare   │
│  Tactical   │◄──│  Tactical   │◄──│  Tactical   │◄──│  Tactical   │
│    Plan     │   │    Plan     │   │   Plan.     │   │   Plan.     │
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  Adequate                         Not Adequate

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│    Test     │   │  Document   │   │  Critique   │   │  Plan   │   │  Completed  │
│   Retest    │──►│    Test.    │──►│    Test     │──►│  OK?    │──►│    Plan     │
│    Plan     │   │             │   │             │   │         │Yes│             │
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      │ or │◄───────────────────────────│  Determine  │            │  Implement  │
      └────┘                            │  Areas of   │            │   Plan &    │
                                        │  Concern.   │            │ Communicate │
                                        └─────────────┘            ├─────────────┤
                                                                   │  Review &   │
                                                                   │   Update    │
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[3] Jenaway, W.F, Pre-Emergency Planning, ISFSI, 1996.

Standard of Response Cover

Introduction

"Standards of Response Cover," "Risk Assessment" and "Strategic Planning" are three techniques you can use within an emergency service organization (ESO) to respond to the ever-changing environment of your organization.

Standards of Response Cover (SOC) is a formalization of what most ESOs have been doing for years—determining what is needed to manage emergencies in your communities and assuring its deployment.

To many, SOC has become an area of concern. Questions often heard include, "Why do we have to do this?"; Who is requiring this?"; "What does this have to do with volunteer fire companies?". Fire chiefs should recognize this is simply a validation of their ESOs being able to perform to the level they suggest they are performing.

The current SOC concepts and methodologies are most notable in the work of the Commission on Fire Accreditation International and new initiatives by the National Fire Protection Association and the Insurance Services Offices.

What is a "Standard of Response Cover"

The Commission on Fire Accreditation International defines "Standard of Response Coverage as being those adopted written policies and procedures that determine the distribution, concentration, and reliability of fixed and mobile response forces for fire, emergency medical service, hazardous materials and other forces of technical response."

This can also be phrased as decision on the level of service, based on empirical evidence and rational discussion.

Developing a standard of response cover isn't quick and easy, but it is valuable to the progressive ESO.

Why should we consider developing a "Standard of Response Cover"

The standard of response cover process includes an evaluation of eight components, all of which are integrated into a final methodology for SOC development. They include:

1. Existing Deployment—requires you to map, measure and understand your existing deployment, regardless of its foundation (ISO, community growth, etc.). This will help understand your total reflex and coverage capability.

2. Risk Assessment—requires you to understand fire flow demand and capability, probability of an emergency, and the consequences to life safety and economic impact. New products such as RHAVE (Risk Hazard and Value Assessment) can be used to

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identify and measure risk to occupancy, a demand zone, or the entire community.

3. <u>Risk Expectations</u>—requires you to identify what the community and the ESO want in the form of service, what the outcomes should be, and whether the desired outcomes can be justified. These will assist in establishing critical tasking measures, e.g.:

> Structure Fire Performance Objective
>
> To stop the development of a moderate fire risk when encountered, conducting search and rescue as required, confining damage to as close to the room of origin as possible, and limiting the expansion of heat and smoke damage.
>
> EMS Risk Objectives
>
> To effectively provide a basic level of medical care at the Basic Life Support level to be on-scene in a timely fashion to:
>
> - Assess and prioritize patient situations
> - Minimize death and disability
> - Stabilize patients to the level of
> - Training of responders
> - Intervene successfully in life threatening situations

4. <u>Service Level Objectives</u>—requires you to assemble and evaluate fire growth and flashover, EMS response needs, special service response needs, reflex and response times on-scene operations, problem-solving critical tasks and determining an effective response force. Examples of Service Level Objectives as defined by the Commission on Fire Accreditation International are:

> "For 90% of all incidents, the first-due unit shall arrive within five minutes total reflex time (or travel time). The first-due unit shall be capable of advancing the first line for fire control or starting rescue or providing basic life support for medical incidents."

Or, it can be more specific.

5. <u>Distribution Study</u>—requires you to geographically analyze first-due resources for initial incident intervention, to assure quick deployment in order to minimize and terminate average, routine emergencies. The distribution measures are up to you, but might include % of square miles, % of equally sized analyses areas, % of total road miles in jurisdiction, or some similar measure.

6. <u>Concentration Study</u>—requires you to look at the arrangement of multiple resource spacing (close enough together) so that an initial "effective response force" can be assembled at the scene within the adopted public policy time frames. The initial effective response force is one that should be able to stop the escalation of the emergency for the risk posed. Concentration measures can be similar to distribution measures.

7. <u>Reliability Study</u>—requires you determine the ability to meet performance expectations even if resources are committed on an existing call. This necessitates a historical measure of performances, resource exhaustion, (relocation practice) and expectations.

8. <u>Performance Study</u>—requires you evaluate information and data available such as:

- Existing standards of cover documents
- Risk assessments
- Historical performance
- Cost benefit evaluations, etc.

Conclusion

The SOC can be considered a tool to accomplish several objectives including:

- Evaluating and defining an agency's baseline of operations,
- Identifying benchmarks for achieving an agency's goals, and objectives,
- Determining levels of service for all portions of a community,
- Measuring an agency's performance over different budget operational years.

This communiqué is designed to help you understand the process and begin development of your own SOC. The SOC development process allows each ESO to establish its own SOC, after systematically evaluating all pertinent factors and acknowledging alternatives.

For further guidance you are referred to:

Commission on Fire Accreditation International
Chantilly, VA
www.cfainet.org

Credits

Farnsworth, Dan, "Standards of Response Coverage," can be part of strategic planning.
Fire Chief, 2/01/01.

Coleman, Ronny J., Fire Department "Standards of Response Coverage," PERI, www.peri.org

Commission on Fire Accreditation International, "Standard of Response Coverage," CFAI, Chantilly, VA, 2004.